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DESIGN OF PROPAGANDA IN GERMAN FOREIGN NEWSREELS

(Auslandstonwochenschau)

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SUMMARY

The German weekly newsreels for foreign consumption (Auslandstonwochenschau), generally displayed throughout Europe and in neutral countries elsewhere, are revealed in this analysis to be a subtly designed form of propaganda. An analysis of their content discloses a pattern designed to create an ideology favorable to Nazism, especially in the foreign-born minorities of countries outside Germany and in oppressed populaces.

The contents of ninety newsreels covering the period from the Polish campaign to Crete are examined. More than half of most reels are devoted to "Blitz" scenes out of which the famous "Terror" films were made. Detailed analysis of the "Blitz" material shows that the "Terror" effect is obtained by stressing certain types of scene, backed up by appropriate dialogue. Direct ideological appeals are also made justifying the military action.

The remaining portions of the reels are devoted to themes of German folk-culture, of German political, economic and cultural dominance of continental Europe, of Axis solidarity and dominance, of superior German war potentials, and of moral superiority.

The order of presenting these themes in the reels is logically designed to elicit the belief that Germany is superior in personal cultural values, is dominant in Europe and is so recognized, and is morally justified in the ruthless annihilation of her enemies.

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DESIGN OF PROPAGANDA IN GERMAN FOREIGN NEWSREELS
(Auslandstonwochenschau)

The analysis presented in this report will show that the German weekly newsreels for foreign consumption (Auslandstonwochenschau) are propaganda designed in a subtle psychological fashion to create an ideology favorable to Nazism in the foreign-born minority of countries outside Germany and in people of countries threatened by Germany.

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE NEWSREELS

These newsreels are quite generally displayed all over Europe--in Axis-dominated as well as in neutral countries--probably still are being shown in Argentina and Chile. They constitute, therefore, a very serious form of competition to Allied propaganda. The severity of this competition lies in the fact that the subtle motion picture material has a vivid and lasting impression more potent than most verbal forms.

Equally as important is the fact that the many thousands of foreign-born persons in the United States and South America who have seen these films have for several years been subjected to weekly doses of this propaganda. Foreign-born Germans, Italians and persons from Axis-dominated countries have no doubt formed attitudes which these films are designed to create. Even though such attitudes might not result in disloyal action--they can hardly result in less than doubt and confusion. In any event, the situation is unhealthy for morale and calls for a systematic reeducation of such groups.

The evidence which proves that these films are intended to create an ideological fifth column outside Germany cannot be presented here. Suffice it to say that evidence reveals that distribution of these reels is focused upon the foreign-born minority, that it is "uncommercial", and that, for display to small groups, many 16 mm. reductions are made and distributed.

II. PROPAGANDA DESIGN IN THE CONTENT OF THE NEWSREELS

Our analysis consists of a study of nearly all the ninety weekly newsreels beginning with film #420, issued in Berlin September 14, 1939, at the beginning of the Polish campaign, and ending with #500, issued June 5, 1941, at the beginning of the Russian campaign. The data consist of each weekly script issued in Berlin. The script presents the dialogue of the ten to twelve sequences that comprise each film.

The detailed analysis below will show that all but ten of many hundred separate sequences fell into ideological categories designed to create three general attitudes in the audience. It will be noted, furthermore, that in the films the items supporting the three themes followed the order as shown below. These themes are:

1. That German culture is virile, humane, "folksy", and closely identified with the cultures of neighboring European countries (except England).

2. That Germany is politically, culturally and economically dominant in Europe.

3. That any opposition to Germany is immoral and is ruthlessly crushed by her invincible military machine.

The amount of film devoted to these three themes is unequal. The third theme consists largely of war scenes, and comprises more than half of most reels. We will call these sequences the "Blitz" material, for they depict the "Blitzkrieg" scenes, which when ordered topically into larger "Terror" features became the famous "Feldzug in Polen", "Blitzkrieg im Westen", etc. In ten of the scripts available to us the actual length of each sequence is printed. Our calculations reveal that in nearly 4,000 m. of film, 55 per cent is devoted to Blitz material. The remaining 45 per cent is devoted to non-Blitz material covering the first and second themes above.

III. THE "BLITZ" SEQUENCES

The following analysis of the Blitz material with its accompanying dialogue makes it quite evident why the public reacted to it as terror propaganda when a concentrated amount of it appeared in full-length features. Paradoxically, when half a reel of it was presented once a week for ninety weeks as part of a "newsreel", no public clamor occurred, though the psychological effect of the repetition of it on audiences was no doubt highly effective.

A. "Terror" content.

In order to provide a detailed study of this material, the Blitz sequences were broken down into separate scenes as revealed in the dialogues. To compensate for individual errors of judgment, a large sample was examined---280 scenes covering the Polish campaign to the campaign in Crete.

These 280 scenes were then cast into various theme categories as shown below with the percentage devoted to each:

1. Scenes devoted to military preparations, objectives or concentrations (ships, planes, forts, towns shown as targets; troop movements, etc.). 23%

2. Scenes depicting invincible, superlative military action (tanks crashing, planes attacking, guns shooting, bridge-building--all under fire, or in actually dangerous situations). 22%

3. Scenes showing actual annihilation of the enemy (blowing up of ships, buildings, tanks; ships sinking, planes falling; devastated towns, materiel). 22%

4. Capturing of men and displays of spoils. 29%

5. Victory marches, reviews, etc. 4%

The materials emphasizing ruthless destruction by the invincible German military machine in action are in categories 2 and 3, totaling 44 per cent of the Blitz material, or about a quarter of the entire film. This is vivid pictorial material, shot by army cameramen on the spot. It comes at the end of the reel and leaves an impression of ruthless, inexorable vanquishing of all opposition to Germany.

B. "Terror" by Words.

The accompanying dialogue is designed emotionally to accent ruthless destruction by an unconquerable German force. Repeatedly the enemy is "annihilated", his "resistance is useless", his condition is "hopeless", his attack "collapses", he is "in desperation", he is "wiped out". Towns are "completely destroyed", their streets lie "desolate", fortifications are "pulverized", gaps are "torn" in the enemy lines. German forces "hurl" themselves on the enemy, make "daring and hazardous" or "bold" maneuvers, which are "masterpieces"--they withstand easily the "unheard of demands" of war.

C. Ideological Appeals.

Quite direct appeals to the audience, serving to justify Germany's attack and to point up the immoral action of the enemy are by no means absent. As one reads the dialogues, one notes, however, considerable restraint in this respect.

In 45 scripts inspected, only about one-half include such appeals, and these occupy only a small part of the dialogue. Nevertheless, such appeals are directly made when the situation requires it, as shown in the quotes below.

The audience hears that the attack on Norway was necessary because "England intended to use Norway as a strategic base for a threat to Germany's flank. As a result of a lightning quick occupation by the German Army, this plan was frustrated" (#454).

The attack in the West was necessary to forestall invasion. "In view of the enemy's probable intention of extending the war activity along the Dutch and Belgian territory in order to threaten the Ruhr district, the German Western army decides to attack on the widest front possible" (#455). This German attack is, incidentally, described thus: "The strategic brilliance of the greatest encirclement and annihilation battle of all times is seen in all its effects" (#458).

The air assault on England is retaliatory. The air attacks are a "war of vengeance" (#480, #481) in which the air force "continues its reprisals" (#474), in order to "answer the numerous English attacks on non-military objects of the Reich" (#473)--attacks on "exclusively non-military targets" (#468, #471), "purely residential areas" (#471). Regarding German air objectives, however, "the capital of England comprises a series of important military objectives--Day and night German planes bomb all military objectives of London" (#473). "The German air force continues its systematic destruction of strategic structures of England" (#470). "Heavy engagement of the German air force against the center of the English armament industry, Coventry" (#484).

Similarly, the Balkan campaign is necessary to protect Rumanian oil wells from British "acts of sabotage" (#479); the populace of the Balkans must be protected from British propaganda "which might incite the populace to action" (#503).

IV. THE NON-BLITZ SEQUENCES

The remaining section of the films not devoted to Blitzkrieg is obviously designed to build up in the minds of the audience the attitude that Germany is culturally, politically, economically and militarily superior and dominant.

This fact becomes evident when we observe the content of each of the separate numbered scenes of the non-Blitz section and sort these scenes into certain theme-categories, as listed below. These operations were performed on all the available scripts covering 43 weeks of the four major campaigns: In Norway, in the West, the air attack on England, and in the South.

The period of the "phoney war" and several short lulls were left out. In all there were 289 separate scenes. The various theme-categories with the per cent of the total non-Blitz scenes devoted to them follow:

A. The Folk-culture Theme (41%).

Most of the reels open with scenes of virile sports or "folksy" events located in Germany and a few in bordering occupied or Axis-oriented countries. The effect on the foreign German audience would be to arouse either nostalgia or the-Germans-are-normal-human-beings-after-all type of reaction. Such references incidentally may serve as a buffer against the more stern stuff that comes later in the reel.

B. The Theme of German Political, Economic and Cultural Dominance of, or Association with, the Countries of Continental Europe (35%).

Many scenes are shown of diplomats, leaders, dignitaries, etc., of other continental countries coming to Germany to meet those of the Reich, or the visitations may be the other way around. The effect on the audience is to create the belief that the Reich either dominates the important activities of Europe or is focally identified with them. Such an attitude is basic to the concept of "the New Order", which is, in fact, frequently mentioned.

This dominance or "cooperation" is most joyously welcomed, in the words of the dialogue. Thus, "30,000 Spaniards receive German guests with warm friendship" (#477), they "greet" Himmler and Hitler, whose conversations with Franco "symbolize the warm and friendly unity of the two nations" (#479). Again, in Denmark one sees the "gay leave-taking" of Danish workers bound for Germany (#469, #461).

C. The Theme of Axis-solidarity and Dominance (7%).

In addition to many meetings of military and political figures of Germany, Italy and Japan, the puppets are shown. "Vidkun Quisling assembles the youth of the nation, a political instrument with which to build the new Norway" (#476). "The Emperor of Japan greets the Emperor of Manchukuo" (#466). Wang-Ching-Wei, president of the "new central Government of China" opens the national Chinese Assembly whose themes are "peace and national reconstruction" (#455). These materials appear to be designed to create the belief that the Axis powers have everything quite under control.

D. The Theme of Superior German War Potentials (14%).

Here are included scenes revealing the superlative production of oil, metals, war materiel, food and the matchless training or rehabilitation of men. Before its own eyes, the audience thus sees German resources which, when backed by the Blitz sequences, further fosters the invincibility doctrine.

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E. The Theme of Moral Superiority and War Justification of Germany (3%).

In addition to the direct ideological appeals on this theme noted above in the Blitz section, we find here that German relief organizations are "making great efforts to keep returning (French) refugees" (#466); again, a German relief (Red Cross) plane takes off on a mission, despite the fact that such planes "have been fired upon by British airships" (#466). The first film depicting the attack in the West includes special scenes showing German civilian casualties of a British air raid. Oddly enough, we find no pictures of this latter sort in later films. With the advent of the air attack on England, it may have been considered better policy to ignore this type of vivid material, treating it preferably on the ideological level.

F. Non-propaganda Scenes.

That these news reels are designed for propaganda is strikingly apparent from the fact that among the hundreds of scenes, there is to be found scarcely a dozen devoted to such feature material as natural catastrophes (earthquakes, floods), accidents, etc.,--the unusual events that commonly occur in newsreels.

V. THEME ORDER IN THE NEWSREELS.

The order in which scenes bearing on the various themes are arranged in the reels is important in its effect on an audience. The pattern of folk-culture first, German dominance in the middle, and Blitz scenes at the end constantly recurs in these reels.

A. Evidence.

To marshal supporting evidence of this order, we read all the scripts covering the campaigns in the North, the West, and the Balkans, and tallied the position in the reel at which the numbered scene emphasizing a given theme occurred. Table I shows the result. Look in the column headed "Folk". Note that opposite position 1 in the reel (i.e. the first scene to appear on the screen) there are eight x's. This means that eight scenes depicting strictly folk themes (sports, fairs, etc.) came first. Reading down the column, eight were second, seven were third, and so on. Under "Folk" themes were included scenes from Germany only and from her immediately bordering countries.

To find the positions of scenes reflecting German dominance, we tallied only those revealing clear-cut instances showing German political, economic and military dominance over European countries. The result appears in the column labeled "German dominance". The position of the Blitz scenes are shown in the last column.

B. Psychological Effect of this Order.

It must be remembered that these newsreels are designed for the Germans and other Europeans, especially German minorities in other countries. The order presents a kind of logic to them, which may be expressed as follows: "German culture is human, virile, desirable in terms of personal values; it is seen that Germany is the dominant nation in Europe and is recognized as such by Europeans, a desirable situation since it has just been shown to be superior in human cultural values; German dominance is threatened by immoral enemies, who must be and actually are ruthlessly annihilated by an invincible military machine".

One newsreel alone would not create such a set of beliefs in an audience; but weekly repetitions of the themes could hardly fail to have telling effects.

Table I. The Position in the Newsreels of Scenes Depicting Folk, German Dominance and Blitz Themes.

Each x is a separate scene.

	Position in reel	Folk	German Dominance	Blitz
Beginning of reels	1	xxxx		
		xxxx		
	2	xxxx		
		xxxxx	xx	
	3	xxx	xxxx	
		xxxx	xxxx	x
	4	xxxx	xx	
		xxxx	xxx	x
Middle of reels	5	xxxx	xxx	x
		xxxxx	xxxx	x
	6	xx	xxxx	x
		xx	xxxx	x
	7	x	xx	xx
			xx	xxx
	8	x	x	xxxxx
			xx	xxxxxx
	9	x	xxx	xxxx
Ends of reels			xxx	xxxx
	10			xxxxxx
				xxxxxxx
	11		x	xxx
			x	xxx
	12			xx
				xxx
	13			x
				x